

PROJECTS FOR CITIZENSHIP

Applying the Constitution

The United States Constitution is admired the world over. But a healthy democracy depends on the continuing participation of its citizens—including you. Here are four projects that will help you learn the rewards and challenges of responsible citizenship.



RESEARCH LINKS

CLASSZONE.COM Visit the links for the Constitution

for more information that will help you with these Projects for Citizenship.

PROJECT 1

BECOMING AN EDUCATED VOTER

ENDORISING A CANDIDATE

Choose a campaign for elective office and learn about the issues and the candidates in the campaign. After doing your research, write an endorsement, or a statement in favor, of one of the candidates.



LEARNING ABOUT THE CANDIDATES

- ✓ **Examine news media and news services.** During campaigns, some services and publications offer endorsements that explain why particular candidates are worthy of support.
- ✓ **Get information from political parties.** They provide information on the candidates, but their perspective is biased toward their own candidates. The major parties have Internet sites, as do many local groups and individual candidates.
- ✓ **Contact interest groups,** such as the Sierra Club and the National Association of Manufacturers. They often list candidates' positions on issues and support candidates who share their beliefs.
- ✓ **Look at databases and voters' guides** published by nonpartisan organizations such as the League of Women Voters and Project Vote Smart.

As you use each source, try to identify any bias. Think about the following questions.

- What does the author of this source stand to gain from supporting a particular candidate?
- Is the information in the source complete and accurate?
- Does the author use loaded or inflammatory language?

PRESENTING YOUR PROJECT

After you have written your endorsement, you might send it to a media outlet, such as a newspaper or a television station, or post it on the Internet. Or you might send it to your local or school newspaper.

PROJECT 2

EXPRESSING POLITICAL OPINIONS

WRITING A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Identify an issue that concerns you. Then write a letter or send an e-mail message about that issue to the editor of a newspaper or magazine.

WRITING A PERSUASIVE LETTER

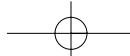
- ✓ **Find an issue** that has been in the news lately and about which you feel strongly.
- ✓ **Read recent articles,** editorials, and cartoons in newspapers or magazines. Notice how they have addressed this issue.
- ✓ **Compose a letter** that clearly and concisely explains your views about the issue you have chosen. Your letter should also include reasons and facts that support your opinion on the issue. It might also advocate some specific action to be taken to address the issue.
- ✓ **Identify the person** to whom you should send your letter, and note any requirements the newspaper or magazine has for writing letters to the editor.
- ✓ **Edit your letter carefully.** Be sure to use standard grammar, spelling, sentence structure, and punctuation.

PRESENTING YOUR PROJECT

Present the letter you wrote to the rest of the class. When you do, explain why you chose to write about this issue.

A student expresses her political opinions as she addresses an audience.





PROJECT 3

UNDERSTANDING HOW TO LOBBY

PLANNING A LOBBYING CAMPAIGN

Form a committee with other students to organize a lobbying campaign—a campaign to influence legislation or public policy. Create a plan for the campaign that includes materials to be presented to government officials. In creating your plan, keep the following points in mind.

CREATING A LOBBYING PLAN

- ✓ **Establish a clear goal** of what you want to achieve. Make sure all members of the group understand and agree with the established goal.
- ✓ **Identify the appropriate people to lobby**—the people who can best help you to achieve your goal. For example, if your group is planning to lobby to have a bill passed, you would lobby the legislators who will vote on the bill. However, if your group wants to lobby for a local improvement—such as cleaning up an abandoned factory site—you should lobby the local officials who make those decisions.
- ✓ **Gather statistics** and other information that support your case. Explore a variety of resources, including the library, the Internet, and news services. Conduct interviews with appropriate state or local officials. Use the information you gather to develop a brief written report that can be given to the officials you intend to lobby.
- ✓ **Organize public opinion** in favor of your case. Gather signatures on petitions or conduct a letter-writing campaign to encourage people who support your goal to contact government officials. You can also create fliers calling attention to your cause.
- ✓ **Present your case** to government officials firmly but politely. Practice your presentation several times before you actually appear before them.

PRESENTING YOUR PROJECT

Share your lobbying plan with the rest of the class in the form of a written proposal that includes materials, such as petition forms, that you will use in your lobbying effort. If you implement your lobbying plan, describe to the class what response you received from the officials you lobbied.



PROJECT 4

VOLUNTEERING IN YOUR COMMUNITY

MAKING AN ORAL REPORT

Identify a local community organization that you might want to help. Find out what kinds of volunteer activities the organization has, such as answering phones in the office, serving food to the homeless, or cleaning vacant lots. Then volunteer to participate in one of those activities. Prepare an oral report to present to the rest of the class about your experiences as a volunteer. Keep the following points in mind as you choose which organization to help.



A group of young volunteers in the Summer of Service project discusses plans with carpenters.

SUGGESTIONS FOR VOLUNTEERING

- ✓ **Decide what kinds of public service projects might interest you.** You might talk to your parents, a teacher, friends, a local church, or a local political organization to learn what kinds of volunteer services are needed in your community.
- ✓ **Call local community organizations** to find out what kinds of volunteer opportunities they offer and decide whether you would like to volunteer for those projects.
- ✓ **Decide what cause you want to support** and identify an organization that addresses that cause.
- ✓ **Decide what type of work you want to do** and work with that organization.

PRESENTING YOUR PROJECT

Deliver an oral report to your class about your experiences as a volunteer. Explain why you chose the specific volunteer activity that you did. Describe the activity you performed. Then explain what effect your volunteering had as well as whether you felt the experience was a good one.